

A DASHIELL HAMMETT *Detective*

THE CREEPING SIAMESE

by DASHIELL HAMMETT

*Collected and Edited,
with Introduction by*

ELLERY QUEEN

LAWRENCE E. SPIVAK, *Publisher*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction by <i>Ellery Queen</i>	3
THE CREEPING SIAMESE	6
THE MAN WHO KILLED DAN ODAMS	21
THE NAILS IN MR. CAYTERER	31
THE JOKE ON ELOISE MOREY	56
TOM, DICK OR HARRY	62
THIS KING BUSINESS	77

A JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY NO. 148 . . . *Published by The Jonathan Press, Inc., 570 Lexington Avenue, New York. Printed in the United States of America. These mysteries are sometimes reprinted in full, but more often they are cut to speed up the story — always, of course, with the permission of the author or his publisher. These stories have not been cut.*

The AMERICAN MERCURY Mystery Books: MERCURY MYSTERY, BESTSELLER
MYSTERY, JONATHAN PRESS MYSTERY

COVER AND TYPOGRAPHY BY GEORGE SALTER
JOSEPH W. FERMAN, *General Manager*

Copyright, 1950, by The Jonathan Press, Inc.

THE CREEPING SIAMESE: *copyright, 1926, by Popular Publications, Inc.*; THE MAN WHO KILLED DAN ODAMS: *copyright, 1923, by Popular Publications, Inc.*; THE NAILS IN MR. CAYTERER: *copyright, 1925, by Popular Publications, Inc.*; THE JOKE ON ELOISE MOREY: *copyright, 1949, by Tops Magazine, Inc.*; TOM, DICK OR HARRY: *copyright, 1948, by The World Publishing Company*; THIS KING BUSINESS: *copyright, 1927, by The Priscilla Company.*

Reprinted by special arrangement with Dashiell Hammett

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

THE NAILS IN MR. CAYTERER

I WAS experiencing, as one will, difficulty with the eighth line of a rondeau when Papa's firm and not to be mistaken tread sounded outside my door. Now I did not like deception, no matter how mild, but neither did I like having Papa quarrel with me, and more forcible, if not actually greater, than my abhorrence of duplicity was Papa's antipathy to my poetry, a prejudice which, I may be excused for believing, owed much of its vigor to the fact that he had never read, so far as I knew, a single line of my work.

In these circumstances I could not feel that it was altogether reprehensible of me to slip the unfinished poem under a pile of reward circulars on my desk while, with my other hand, I picked up the top circular, so that when Papa entered my office I was, at least so far as appearance went, studying the description of one Johnson Tobin, alias The Dis-and-Dat Kid, who had recently escaped from the lawn of the federal prison at Leavenworth.

"Up and at 'em, Robin! Got a job."

Picking up my hat, I followed Papa out into the corridor, where he explained somewhat fancifully, as we stood waiting for an elevator, "Hop Cayterer's been squirting tears in my ear over the phone. By the sound of his whining, somebody's done him wrong for one of his millions."

One who had not known Papa might have thought, witnessing his joviality of voice and demeanor, that he derived considerable satisfaction from Mr. Cayterer's plight, but that notion, I need hardly say, would have been quite unjust. The truth was simply that Papa liked his work in its every aspect, and thus greeted each new task with a wealth of pleasurable anticipation which, it must be confessed, sometimes rendered him just a little callous to the anguish of those who brought their difficulties to him.

Our client's offices were only a few blocks from ours in distance, but far from ours in appearance; ours were small and almost severely plain; Mr. Cayterer's were large and elaborately furnished, and the largest

and most luxurious was his private office, into which a neat, bright-eyed boy of perhaps fifteen ushered us.

Although this was not my first visit to the office (we had, the year before, performed some work for Mr. Cayterer in connection with a dubious cement contract), I was struck afresh by the room's charming arrangement. It was a room whose length was perhaps twice its width, and in it there was nothing — from the stained glass of the wide windows to the old charts that covered the walls above time-darkened paneling — at which one could point a finger and say, "That does not become a place of business"; and neither was there — from the dull black of the richly carved desk at which Mr. Cayterer and his secretary sat to the wrought iron knob on the door behind us — a trace of the rigid angularity and hard shininess that make modern commercial furnishings so hideous.

Mr. Cayterer stood up to shake Papa's hand and mine. He was a large man, nearly as large as Papa, and of about the same age, which was sixty-three, but smooth-shaven — Papa wore an irregular grey mustache — and without Papa's ruddiness. One is inclined to expect an outdoor complexion of a mining engineer, but doubtless Mr. Cayterer's sallowness could be defended on the grounds that he was more promoter than engineer.

"Sit down, Mr. Thin," he said to Papa, and to me; and to his secretary: "That will be all now, Miss Brenham."

"Yes, Mr. Cayterer."

She had not looked at Papa and me when we came into the office, and she did not look at us now as she gathered up letters, pencil and notebook and withdrew. She was a distinctly attractive young woman of not more than twenty years, with soft lemon-colored hair and singularly mild blue eyes.

Mr. Cayterer slid an open teak box that was really a trunk full of cigars across the desk toward us. Papa took a cigar while I smiled my thanks and my refusal.

"Thin," the promoter said slowly to Papa when their cigars were burning, "some — is crucifying me."

Papa moved his cigar from the right corner of his mouth to the left without the assistance of his fingers.

"Is, has or is trying to?"

Mr. Cayterer took his cigar from his mouth, and, turning it in his hand, studied it without visible satisfaction. The cigar was, I perceived, burning quite crookedly, a detail not without its significance.

"Well, he's got two nails in me and his hammer's up over the third."

"So. Suppose we take a look at the couple you've got."

"We'll get around to that, Thin. Do you know anything about China? About Chinese affairs today?"

"Only that all those dinguses they sell in Chinatown don't come from there."

"That's something to know," the promoter replied gravely, and frowned again at his unevenly lighted cigar.

Clasping my hands in my lap, I repressed my impatience, my impulse to fidget. No one who had read, in *The Jongleur*, my appreciation of Danko's poems could have accused me of being without sympathy for the primitive; but I felt, none the less, listening to the casual metaphors, the jocular irrelevancies, with which Papa and Mr. Cayterer skirted around whatever business had brought us here, that these circumlocutions, these survivals of Indian council fire and bushman community hut, might well have been dispensed with in favor of modern conciseness and clarity.

"China's got a central government," the promoter approached the point of our conference at last, "but it doesn't mean anything. Maybe tomorrow there'll be a new president, dictator, emperor. It doesn't make much difference if there is, or which. What power there is in the hands of the tuchuns — the governors of the provinces. A real central government will come when one of the tuchuns is big enough to buy in or beat out the other tuchuns. I think I know who'll be that one — and that's what got me into this.

"Never mind his name, but he — this special tuchun — and I are old friends. We've done business together in the past and, what's more, made a profit at it. Now look! The U. S. is the U. S., and China is China, but politics is politics and people are people. The leading candidates for the job of running China just now are Chang Tso-lin and Feng Yu-hsian, with a few weaker ones trailing them. They've been making their plays for some time, and they've got themselves nicely

balanced. One wins here, the other wins there. Neither is strong enough to push the other out of the way — a stand-off.

"That sounds familiar, huh? Sounds like a good American presidential convention, doesn't it? Well, what happens here when a couple of candidates get themselves balanced like that? I'll tell you what happens. Somebody you haven't thought of, but who has been doing some thinking on his own account, breaks loose and grabs the job. Well, the dark horse tuchun in this case is my friend. It's a gamble. He's got a good chance of putting it across, but he needs backing, good round dollars. If he wins there'll be concessions — mines and maybe some oil. If he loses there'll be nothing. It's a plain gamble — put up your money and take your chances. But it's a good gamble because I know my man and he's on the level.

"I didn't have the money to swing the deal by myself, and wouldn't if I could. I'm a little bit too old to plunge into anything up to the hilt. So I formed a syndicate, took in four others who don't mind risking something on a likely game. So each of us put up his share, and the money was waiting to be shipped to China — and then came the first nail."

From a drawer of his desk Mr. Cayterer took a small white envelope which he handed to Papa. Standing up, I looked at it over Papa's shoulder. It bore a Japanese stamp and a Kobe postmark, and was addressed in a somewhat heavy though irregular hand:

Hopkins F. Cayterer, Esq.,
1021 Seaman's Bank Building,
San Francisco, Calif., U. S. A.

The letter it enclosed, in the same handwriting, read:

My dear Mr. Cayterer:—

By the best of luck I find myself in a position to be of great assistance to you. It is a near thing, but if you act quickly I can keep your arrangements with the Honorable K. from coming to the attention of the press.

The New York draft should be made payable to my order,

but should be sent to Mr. B. J. Randall, General Delivery, Los Angeles, California. — This letter should be in your hands by the tenth of the month and the draft should reach Mr. Randall by the fifteenth at the very latest. Trusting that you will not endanger your Asiatic plans by incautious actions, I am,

Most respectfully yours,

FITZMAURICE THROGMORTON.

P. S. Ten thousand dollars will be sufficient. T.

"So." Papa rolled the cigar in his mouth and laid the letter on the desk. "Know him?"

"Never heard of him before." And then Mr. Cayterer said a most astounding thing: "I sent him the ten thousand."

Papa expressed his astonishment in three words that I need not repeat here. My own amazement was fully as great as my parent's; it seemed preposterous that a man of Mr. Cayterer's caliber should have submitted to so brazen a demand.

"You see he's got me," Mr. Cayterer defended his folly. "Maybe he doesn't really know anything, is just guessing. It's a cinch he can't prove anything. But that's no good. One hint and the game's up. The State Department wouldn't do a thing to me if they got wise! And then there are the rival tuchuns, the Japanese, the Russians and British, and even my man's own supporters. They would all pile on him like a ton of bricks if they smelled the game before he's ready to pull the trigger.

"If he wins we won't have to worry about what howling these parties do. The gravy will be ours, and they can yap their heads off for all the good it'll do them. But a suspicion now would ruin us. What else could I do? Paying hush money is foolish, but there I am: millions in it if we win and three lines in a newspaper can beat us. What else could I do but send this Throgmorton his money and hope he'd go on a spree on it and get his throat cut?"

"Didn't you even try to get hold of these birds?" Papa asked, face and voice indicating clearly how little he valued the promoter's defense.

"Yes, I tried, but it did me little enough good. I sent word to China to have the Japanese end looked to, and I've had Randall hunted for

in Los Angeles, but with no luck. Not being able to go to the Post Office Department for help crippled us. Then I heard from them the second time."

He produced another letter, similar to the first, in which Throgmorton thanked him for the draft, declined his invitation to a conference, suggested that in the interests of secrecy Mr. Cayterer's agents had better stop their inquiries into his (Throgmorton's) affairs, declared that several unforeseen matters had arisen to make necessary the expenditure of an additional twenty-five thousand dollars, and instructed Mr. Cayterer to send a draft for that amount to B. J. Randall, General Delivery, Portland, Oregon.

"And you?" Papa asked.

"Sent it."

"So. Now what do your partners — the other members of your syndicate — think of your generosity?"

"They" — there was an odd reluctance in the promoter's voice and he was staring at a distant chair — "know nothing about these letters, yet. Have you noticed anything — anything peculiar about the letters?"

"American paper, but that proves nothing."

"The handwriting —" Mr. Cayterer stopped watching the distant chair and looked at Papa and at me with the eyes of an orator who is about to startle his audience. "The handwriting is mine."

To that I said nothing, while Papa said, "So."

"It is. Not exactly mine, you understand, but — well, it's about like mine would be if I tried to disguise it and didn't make too good a job of it."

"And that's why you didn't show it to the others?"

"Yes, or that's one of the reasons. They might have thought I was trying to put something over on them. But I would have been tempted to pocket the loss and keep quiet anyway. A couple of the members of the syndicate could be frightened out easily enough."

"Mr. Cayterer," I made my first contribution to the discussion, "you did not, of course, write those letters, did you?"

"What?" His face was suddenly rosier than Papa's and in his open mouth quite a bit of dental work was visible. "What the what," he said, "do you think I am?"

"Behave yourself, Robin!" Papa ordered sharply.

"It is a point that should be covered," I insisted, refusing to be cowed, "and I should like an answer."

The promoter brushed his cigar off the desk, whither it had fallen when his mouth had so abruptly opened, and looked at me as if I were some not very prepossessing thing seen for the first time.

"You guessed it," he complied with my request at last. "I didn't of course write them."

"Thank you, Mr. Cayterer," and I relapsed into silence again.

"What next?" Papa questioned the promoter while scowling at me.

"Another letter yesterday — this one."

It too was in the same handwriting, signed Fitzmaurice Throgmorton, and postmarked Kobe, Japan; and it ordered that a draft for one hundred thousand dollars be sent to the familiar Randall, General Delivery, Spokane, Washington.

"Fall for this one?"

"No!" Mr. Cayterer sat up very straight, shut his mouth hard so that the flesh which hid his jawbone bulged out, and, somewhat theatrically, slapped the top of his desk with one well-padded palm. "I've paid him enough. I'm paying you now. Get hold of these people. Tell 'em they're welcome to what they've got, but that's all. If he wants to blow up my game — all right! There's prison in it for them!"

Papa was not one to be greatly impressed by eloquence or fervor or impassioned gestures.

"And suppose they laugh at me when I tell 'em that?" he inquired. "Will I have to admit I was only bluffing, or do you really want them thrown into the can?"

Mr. Cayterer wrinkled his pale forehead and rubbed his fleshy chin with the hand that had a moment ago so emphatically thumped the desk.

"Well, I don't want to be throwing money around like confetti. If you can't scare them off I suppose I'll have to pay something. It hurts to be played for a sucker, but there's too much money involved to let pride interfere. You find them and do what you can with them. You know how to handle those people, Thin. But, mind you, no fuss; no dragging in the Federal people!"

"Uh-huh. Now about the members of your syndicate — who are they?"

"Is that necessary?"

"Yes. I won't work blindfolded."

Mr. Cayterer looked at the top of his desk, cleared his throat, pouted complainingly at the desk, cleared his throat again, and said:

"All right. Tom Aston of the Golden Gate Trust Company, Captain Lucas of the Lucas-Born shipping concern, and Murray Tyler and Judge DeGraff of that law firm."

"So. Now who besides you and them knows about the scheme?"

"No one else knows about the — the plan. My secretary, of course, and my nephew, but they —"

"What about this secretary? You mean the girl who was here when we came?"

"Yes, and you can disregard her in this matter. Miss Brenham has been in my employ for two years, which is not such a long time, maybe, but long enough for me to know that she is thoroughly trustworthy."

"So." The low value Papa placed on our client's opinion almost flaunted itself in the accent he gave his favorite monosyllable. "And the nephew?"

"Ford — Ford Nugent is his name — is my sister's son. His parents are dead. He is a wild youngster, right enough, but I don't think anybody ever questioned his honesty. He's knocked around a lot, and knows Asia, so I got hold of him when this thing came up, intending to send him over there to keep an eye on things for me when the plan was put in operation."

"And the rest of your employees?"

"They know nothing at all about it."

"You mean you think they don't. Who are they?"

"Well, there's John Benedick, my chief clerk, who has been with me for ten years or more; and Carty, the bookkeeper, ten years; and Fraser and Ert, office men; and Ralph, the office boy, Miss Brenham's brother; and Petrie, a draftsman; and Miss Zobel, stenographer and file clerk. There are others, but they are outside men, and none of them has been in the office since the Chinese plan came up. However, none of these people I have mentioned could possibly know anything about it."

"We'll want their addresses," Papa said, quite as if Mr. Cayterer's assurances had never been uttered, "and also your nephew's. Now about your Chinese dark horse?"

"What about him?"

"Would he gyp you?"

"What for?" Mr. Cayterer was scornful. "I'm planning to hand him dollars where these blackmailers are getting pennies!"

"But how about his people?"

"There's something in that. The leak must be on his end. But he can move there better than we, and we can trust him to take care of it. He's nobody's fool!"

"What did he say when you sent him word of the leak?"

"He sent back word to pay what was demanded and deduct it from his fund, and promised that if the trouble was on his end there wouldn't be many demands."

"So. Now about the two drafts you sent — have they come back to the bank yet?"

"No, they hadn't at ten this morning."

"Have you sent any of the syndicate's money to the tuchun yet?"

"No. The first instalment was to have gone today, but I don't like to let it go until I've got an idea how we're going to come out on this business."

"That's just as well," Papa decided. "If I were you, I'd hang on to it until we see what's at the bottom of this. Is that nephew of yours around?"

"Not just now. He'll be in this afternoon if you want to talk to him. But you might as well take my word for it that Ford is all right."

"Does he know about these blackmail letters?"

"Yes."

"What did he say?"

"He advised me not to pay a nickel. But he's young."

"So. Let's have the girl in."

Mr. Cayterer put a finger on one of the battery of dark buttons on his desk, and almost immediately the door opened to admit the secretary, her blue eyes attentive on her employer, her pencil and notebook ready in her hands.

"No dictation, Miss Brenham. Mr. Thin wants to talk to you about that Chinese affair. I've engaged him to straighten it out for me."

"Oh, yes, Mr. Cayterer," she said, and faced Papa and me.

"Won't you sit down, Miss Brenham?" I offered her the chair from which I had risen.

"Oh, thank you!"

"What do you think of this Throgmorton business?" Papa asked her while I found another chair.

She looked interrogatively at her employer, who said, "I want you to answer Mr. Thin's questions just as if they were my own, Miss Brenham."

"I think it's a shame," she exclaimed, her singularly mild blue eyes bright on Papa's face, "that Mr. Cayterer's wonderful plans should have been interfered with in such a manner!"

I knew Papa would not like that, nor did he.

"Very regrettable," he agreed in a tone that expressed perfect indifference to her opinion, "but that's not exactly what I'm getting at. Where do you think the leak is?"

"Why Mr. Cayterer thinks that —"

"Just a moment. Mr. Cayterer's ideas may be right or they may be wrong. Anyway I've heard them. What I want now are your own, if any. Do you think the leak was in this office?"

"Oh, no, sir! I think that the letters' having come from Japan shows that the leak, as you call it, must have been over there."

"The blackmailer could have an accomplice there," Papa pointed out. "It's a fact, you know, that the blackmail was to be paid in this country."

The young woman looked at Mr. Cayterer, who stopped lighting a cigar to agree: "You're right about that, Thin."

"Oh, yes!" Miss Brenham's gaze carried evident admiration from face to face. "I should never have thought of that!"

"Have you talked to anybody about Mr. Cayterer's scheme?" Papa continued.

"Oh, no, sir! Not to anyone."

"That's wrong. I asked you if you'd talked to anybody — not to anybody outside of this one and that one."

"Oh, to Mr. Cayterer and Mr. Nugent, but no one else. I certainly do not ever discuss Mr. Cayterer's affairs, and he had especially cautioned me about this."

Papa got up and spoke to Mr. Cayterer: "Get us that list."

"Thank you, Miss Brenham," I said warmly as she and I stood up, endeavoring to offset Papa's brusqueness toward her.

Before she could reply Mr. Cayterer had instructed her: "Miss Brenham, will you make up a list of the names and addresses of the office force?"

"Including Nugent and any ex-employees, that is, any who left within say the past three months," Papa added.

"Oh, there aren't any of those, are there, Mr. Cayterer?"

"No."

"What time this afternoon will Nugent be in?" Papa asked while we were waiting for the young woman to return with the list.

"At three."

"We'll be in to see him."

"Very well. I won't be here, but I'll leave word for him to wait for you."

A few minutes later Miss Brenham brought in the list, and Papa and I left with it.

"What do you think of it, Robin?" Papa asked in the street.

"I am not altogether satisfied that we did the wisest thing in accepting the operation," I responded. "Morally, if not legally, we have made ourselves accomplices in Mr. Cayterer's Chinese enterprise, and that enterprise, as you of course know, is clearly and plainly in violation of the —"

"Stop it!" Papa's voice was so sharp that a man immediately in front of us jumped, looked back over his shoulder at Papa with startled eyes, and moved over toward the curb to get out of his way. "What do you think of that Brenham?" Papa went on in a more moderate tone.

"I think our Miss Queenan might profitably learn something of secretarial conduct from her."

"You do, do you?" Papa stood abruptly still in the middle of the sidewalk. The man he had frightened a moment ago, now behind him, bumped into him, and scurried away from Papa's scowl as if his life

were in danger. "So that's why you're always picking on Florence." Papa turned his scowl on me. "She don't bow and scrape enough! Well, let me tell you, young fellow, the day after she ever tries to slobber over me like that Brenham does over Cayterer she'll be reading the Help Wanted Female column!

"I don't like that Brenham," he continued as he ceased blocking the sidewalk and moved on toward our office again. "She'll scalp Cayterer one of these days. A slinky woman!"

I said nothing. To have attempted a defense of Miss Brenham against this unreasonable attack would have been merely to increase Papa's disliking for her.

"Let me tell you something about Cayterer and his secretaries. He says he's had this one two years. That's a record for him. He and his secretaries used to be a standing joke. He never kept one longer than three or four months, and they were all girls you'd look at the second time. Figure it out for yourself. And keep your eye on this one. She's slinky!"

I refused to contradict him, though my manner must have indicated that I was far from agreeing with what I considered his very groundless aversion to a young woman whose manner had favorably impressed me.

"You better see what Ford Nugent is like this afternoon," Papa said as we entered our building, "and if you run into that woman, don't let her close your eyes." And he added, characteristically, "She's slinky!"

"Yes, sir," I replied quietly.

It was three-fifteen when I returned to Mr. Cayterer's offices.

"Is Mr. Nugent in?" I asked the boy who had admitted us in the morning.

"Yes, sir. You're Mr. Thin? Well, he's in Mr. Cayterer's office. You can go right back."

I did so, and, having been thus directed, I opened the door of the promoter's private office without knocking, a freedom of which I should certainly not have availed myself otherwise, and which I immediately regretted, although later my regret was somewhat less. Opening the door, then, I surprised Miss Brenham in the act of being kissed by, and apparently also kissing, a tall young man with rumpled brown

hair over a sun-browned thin face.

They were standing, the participants in this decidedly unbusinesslike tableau, beside Mr. Cayterer's desk, with their arms familiarly around one another, and their faces — after the quite appreciable moment their muscles required for reaction to the clicking of the door — turned toward me. Then the young woman sprang swiftly away from her — shall I say accomplice? — while he looked at me as if he did not like me.

"I beg your pardon!" I exclaimed.

"You ought to."

The white line of a scar, running diagonally across the young man's dark forehead, gave him, now that his features were tinged with chagrin, a peculiarly sinister appearance, which, however, was somewhat tempered by the absence of any brutality in his face.

"I came by appointment with Mr. Cayterer." I did not wish to be suspected of having deliberately spied. "The boy told me to come right in. I assure you I would not otherwise have dared to enter without knocking, and I certainly had no intention, no thought, of intruding at — at such a time."

The young man blinked his grey eyes and turned them toward Miss Brenham, who, her face becomingly pinkened, was gathering up papers from the top of her employer's desk. When he looked at me again he had stopped blinking, and there was a faint trace of humor in his face.

"You're the detective jobbie?"

I nodded, although I did not especially care for the words he had selected.

"Can you beat it?" He looked at me slowly and carefully, from head to foot. "You ought to be a good one! I never saw one that looked, acted and talked less like one, and I've known a few — even been jailed by some."

"You are Mr. Nugent?" I asked, disregarding for the time his admission, which certainly reflected no credit on him.

"Yes, and you're Thin. Sit down and let's have it out."

He sat in Mr. Cayterer's chair, while I took the one Papa had occupied that morning, and Miss Brenham, carrying her papers, left the office, closing the door softly behind her.

The subsequent interview was rather unprofitable, inasmuch as the

young man stubbornly refused to tell me anything of value about himself.

"Uncle Hop can give you the dope on me," he insisted. "I wouldn't tell you anything I didn't want him to know, and he's got all the facts I want made public."

"But this is a serious matter, Mr. Nugent, and a reticence that might be perfectly proper and justifiable in ordinary circumstances would not, I think you must grant, be becoming in these."

He finished making a cigarette, lighted it, and pulled out a drawer to serve as a support for his feet.

"It's serious for Uncle Hop, and maybe for you, but not for me. I'm only the hired man. There's a trip and maybe some excitement, and a salary in it for me. And any mixups are in my favor, because they'll increase the excitement and maybe the salary." He emphasized the disloyalty of this unaccountable speech by grinning with broad recklessness through an outflung cloud of cigarette smoke. "So don't expect me to bellyache about your troubles."

"You spoke a moment ago, Mr. Nugent, of having been arrested: 'jailed by some,' referring to detectives, were, I think, your words. Would you mind relating the circumstances?"

"Fat chance, my lad!" He was, I should have said, not more than twenty-six or seven years of age, which would have made him some five years younger than I, and his "my lad" therefore ridiculous. "We criminals don't go around exposing our records."

The interview was really most unsatisfactory: he refused, in the face of all the persuasive force I could bring to bear, to assist me to the least extent, expressing complete indifference to his uncle's difficulties, and maintaining that his only interest lay in the pay he was to receive and in the fact that there might be, as he phrased it, a chance to shoot somebody. By the end of three quarters of an hour I found I had more than enough of this nonsense, and so, making no attempt beyond that required by common courtesy to conceal my disapproval, I terminated the interview by withdrawing.

In Papa's office, when I returned there, I found him and Miss Queenan sitting at his desk, with an afternoon paper spread in front of them. It was one of our stenographer's duties to read carefully the

daily papers, clipping and filing such items as might be of interest to us; that is, those items that dealt with crimes or with persons who had or seemed likely to be implicated in or affected by crimes. By these means we had in the course of some years built up a really valuable library of this sort. But now, as I approached Papa's desk, I saw, as I had indeed suspected, for it was not unusual, that what held Papa's and Miss Queenan's attention was nothing more nor less than the comic strips page.

"If you don't stop sniffing at what I do I'm going to hit you with something, Robin!" Papa looked up from his — shall I say vapid — entertainment to threaten. "Did you see Nugent?"

"Yes, sir, although not very successfully. I found him a rather irresponsible, not to say foolish, young man whose conversation was purely facetious."

"So. I found out a few things about him. Left college to enlist during the war. Stayed in training camps here till the war was over. Took his training to South America, Asia, and the Balkans afterward, and used it in whatever fighting he could find. Spent a couple of months in Japan last year. Got no relations but Cayterer, no job but soldiering, no money."

"That's very good, sir," I said. "Now there is one thing I discovered. When I entered Mr. Cayterer's office Nugent and Miss Brenham were engaged in — well, rather demonstrative affection."

Miss Queenan jerked her head up to toss her short brown hair out of her eyes, and her eyes were darkly bright. "You mean kissing?"

"I do, Miss Queenan."

"So," Papa grunted. "That might come in handy, but there's nothing very important about a youngster kissing his uncle's secretary. If he didn't kiss her it might mean something."

"Is she pretty?" Miss Queenan asked.

"Ask Robin. My idea is she's slinky!"

"She is," I said judiciously, "quite attractive in appearance."

"A blonde, I bet!"

I made no response to that, since the conclusion's pertinence was as hidden from me as the means by which Miss Queenan had arrived at it.

"See here, Mr. Thin" — Miss Queenan still called Papa and me Mr.

Thin to our faces, though I happened to know that in speaking of us to others she habitually dispensed with even that last barrier between employer and employed — “you’re not going to tell Mr. Cayterer about that, are you?”

“Why shouldn’t I?” I demanded, though what I should have liked to ask was by what right she questioned my intentions; but that would have led to words with Papa, who deliberately encouraged her to intrude in our affairs.

“Why because — because it’s none of his business. Is it?” she sought Papa’s support.

“None at all,” Papa agreed quite as if he meant it. But that he should have been sincere was, I knew, preposterous; he simply would not side with me against Miss Queenan, regardless of the absurdities this practice made him so frequently defend.

“I think it is,” I stood my ground. “He has employed us to secure information about his affairs for him, and such information as we may secure is his property.”

“I’m surprised, Mr. Thin! And you a poet!”

“Miss Queenan, it is true that by inclination and avocation I am a poet, but it is also true that by parental compulsion I am a detective; and, since I must be a detective, I purpose being as efficient and conscientious a detective as I may be. That certain aspects of the work are and always have been distasteful to me is, I trust, not a secret, but I may not on that account shirk them.”

Papa applauded with exaggerated heartiness, beating his palms noisily together.

“That’s my boy, Florence!” he boasted with the mock-pride he liked to affect. “Cold-blooded as a tadpole! A pip, huh?”

“You know what I think?” she said. “I think he’s smitten with this Miss Brenham, and is telling on Nugent just out of jealousy!”

“That may be.” What could one say in the face of so idiotic a charge? “However, I consider that I should be lax in my duty if I concealed this or any other information of the sort from Mr. Cayterer, and I shall certainly tell him.”

I did so the following morning, in the promoter’s office.

“Not altogether a surprise,” he said deep in his chest, rolling a cigar

in his hands, apparently unaware of the considerable damage he was doing it. "I suspected something of the sort. It doesn't make any difference. I've decided to send Ford to China by this afternoon's boat. This won't have anything to do with the leak; you can count on that. Was there anything else?"

There was nothing else: I said so, and left the office, pausing to learn from the office boy that Nugent had not come in yet. Downstairs, in the lobby, I went into a telephone booth and got Papa on the wire.

"I want to keep Nugent under surveillance, but can't do it myself, of course, since he knows me. Can you spare me an operative?"

"Yes. Smitts is in. Where are you?"

"In the lobby of Cayterer's building — Seaman's National Bank Building."

"Right. I'll send Smitts over to you."

I had hoped that Smitts would arrive before Nugent, so that I could have designated the young man to the operative and had that part of the surveillance over with, but, unfortunately, Nugent was going into an elevator as I left the booth. Five minutes later Smitts arrived, one of the men Papa and I employ from time to time, a small sandy chap with prematurely deep vertical lines in his cheeks and watery pale eyes that see with surprising accuracy.

"Smitts, there is a man I want you to shadow. His name is Ford Nugent, and the chances are he will sail for China this afternoon. I wish to know what he does between now and then. You will telephone me from the pier as soon as he gets there."

"I'll do that thing," he promised.

"Very well. Now you had better take your position by the street door, so he will not see us together. When he gets out of the elevator I will speak to him, going on into the elevator as if I were going up to his office. You will shadow him."

This arrangement was not to hold, however: when Nugent stepped out of the elevator he was accompanied by Miss Brenham, and he caught my arm when I spoke to him.

"How are you, Mr. Thin?" he hailed me gaily. "And how are all the little mysteries?"

He seemed quite elated, doubtless at the prospect of the trip to China with its "chance to shoot somebody."

"Good morning, Miss Brenham. Good morning, Mr. Nugent," I responded.

"Got a couple of hours to spare?" he asked, and then, as I hesitated, "I don't mean to waste. Here it is: if you'll come along with us and promise not to interfere, not to desert us until we finish what we're up to, I'll promise to tell you something about your leak."

"What would be the nature of that something?" I inquired, watching Miss Brenham, whose blue eyes were focused, with some perplexity, on her companion's face.

"It will be something that will save you trouble, keep you from going off on the wrong foot, maybe, though I won't pretend it'll clear everything up."

"Very well," I agreed, "on that condition I will accompany you."

"Good!" Nugent grasped my elbow with one hand, Miss Brenham's with the other, and urged us toward the street door. "We've got to hurry!"

Passing Smitts in the vestibule, I shook my head slightly to indicate that he was not to follow, and then the three of us got into a taxicab that was waiting at the curb. Nugent gave the chauffeur a Post Street number.

"So you told Uncle Hop what you saw yesterday?" he asked as the taxicab began to move into the westbound stream of Market Street traffic. His voice was careless, but I could see that Miss Brenham was watching me intently.

"Yes. There was nothing else to do. We contracted to furnish Mr. Cayterer with what information we could secure, and we must do so."

"Just the same," the young woman said softly, "it wasn't nice."

"Stick around," Nugent laughed, the scar on his forehead curling up at the ends, lending his laugh a sardonic tone, "and you'll have something else to tell him."

The Post Street address was a large apartment building, into which Nugent went, leaving Miss Brenham and me in the taxicab.

I took advantage of the opportunity to engage her in conversation.

"Does Mr. Cayterer know what you are doing, Miss Brenham?"

"Not yet."

"Do you think he will approve?"

"I don't think so. I don't care whether he does. I hope he doesn't! I'm not going back there again — not ever. I'm going with Ford. Thank God I don't have to go back there again!"

"Come, Miss Brenham," I remonstrated, for she had become surprisingly vehement, "it couldn't have been so bad as all that — being in Mr. Cayterer's employ."

"It was worse than all that. You've no idea, Mr. Thin! You've — you've heard how hard it was for him to keep a secretary, how none of them stayed for longer than a few weeks, before I came?"

"Yes, Miss Brenham, I have heard that."

"And you have your opinion of the reason?"

"No, Miss Brenham," I said, "I have no opinion."

"Well, you've heard other opinions, I guess. And it would have been better if they were right, but they weren't. There wasn't any — any social relations between Mr. Cayterer and his secretaries. To him a secretary was — was an audience, or, as Ford says, somebody to strut in front of. That was why they never stayed long. A girl was bound to see through him before long, and if she let him see it — and he was sharp enough — then he got rid of her."

"Really, now, Miss Brenham, Mr. Cayterer does not —"

"I know! He isn't completely a fool by any means. But that's what makes it so sickening. He can — he does do really remarkable things, big things. But you should see him preparing to do them! Indecision, timidity hiding behind casualness at first. And then he begins to talk, to boast, to pose, jokingly at first, so he won't be tied to anything if he doesn't muster up enough courage to carry it through.

"And that's where his secretary's part comes in. She must look big-eyed and amazed at him. And then he begins to outline a possible plan, designed principally, it would seem, to make his secretary gasp. And every time she gasps, he sticks his chest farther out and adds a more daring detail, until at last he's got a plan that is really a marvel of audacity, and, what is more, he has got himself into a frame of mind that enables him to carry it out.

"And all the time his secretary knows that the least let-up in her

worship would spoil the whole thing, because he isn't a man who can be goaded into accomplishment. He must be nursed. There must be someone beside him to exclaim and purr and flatter. And the fact that under that influence he can do tremendous things, overcome immense obstacles, somehow only makes it all the more sickening.

"And because I understood this almost from the very first is why I have stayed with him so much longer than the others. I understood what it was he really wanted of me, what he was really paying for, and I considered it as much a part of my duty as if he had put it in words. It wasn't dishonest of me to fawn on him and flatter him, because that's what he was paying me for; but it was — well, sickening is the word that keeps coming to me. And after Ford came, it wasn't — I couldn't stand it any longer."

She stopped and looked down at the glove she was twisting, and then up at me, who was looking at the taximeter.

"You think I am exaggerating, don't you, Mr. Thin? You think I am making up an extravagant theory out of perhaps a few very ordinary facts?"

I did indeed think so, but I didn't like to say so, and neither did I like to lie about it. While I hesitated she began to talk again.

"Here, I can show you what I mean. These Throgmorton letters — Mr. Cayterer did not tell me about either of the first two until after he had sent the drafts. He didn't tell me about them, in fact, until I had stumbled on them, or on the third of them anyway. What he had done was what was his natural course — he had submitted to those ridiculous demands, had actually thrown away thirty-five thousand dollars because he hadn't the backbone not to submit. Half an hour after I had found out about them and had let him talk about them, and about what he was going to do about them, he had sent for you and your father and had determined not to pay any more. As truly as I'm sitting here, Mr. Thin, I could —"

"The story of your young life?" Nugent asked, assisting an extremely thin young woman in an extremely short skirt into the taxicab.

"Almost," Miss Brenham said, flushing. "I was telling him about Mr. Cayterer."

Then she fell to exchanging kisses and salutatory incoherencies with

the thin young woman, whose name I learned when introduced was Betty (Elizabeth, I assumed) Bartworthy.

The house in front of which the taxicab presently disgorged us was a parsonage, where Nugent and Miss Brenham were married. From the parsonage, in the same taxicab, we went to the bride's residence, a small house on Fourteenth Street. Miss Bartworthy and I remained in the taxicab while the newly married couple went indoors.

"I knew she'd land him," Miss Bartworthy said when the door had closed behind them.

"He's a very fortunate young man, I'm sure," I politely volunteered.

Deliberately, Miss Bartworthy made a most repulsive face at me — a quite horrible distortion of her features.

"My dear young lady!" I exclaimed.

She laughed and looked away from me, out of the window at the opposite sidewalk, her thin fingers nervously fondling the spiny surface of a silver-dipped seahorse suspended on a black ribbon.

I could make nothing of her actions, and though she did not speak again — did not even look at me again — I felt relief when the Nugents joined us, running down the steps and across the sidewalk, his arms full of bags, her hand waving at a large-bodied woman who stood on the house's top step either laughing or crying.

We got in motion again, toward the pier, with little time to spare.

"Don't you think," I suggested as we adjusted ourselves to the small space at our disposal, "that since you're going to be in a hurry when you reach the pier you might as well tell me now what you have promised?"

"There's no hurry. I can tell you in — let's see — five words."

"Oh, very well."

At the pier there was precious little or no time to spare. We had to run for it, with the two young women going ahead, while Nugent and I struggled with the bags. Beside the boat, Nugent shook my hand up and down while his wife and Miss Bartworthy were disarranging one another's hats.

"That dope I promised you: neither Alma nor I had anything to do with it!"

"I didn't expect much," I called after him as he hurried aboard,

"but I did hope for the truth, and you haven't given it to me."

His dark face, turned back over his shoulder as he climbed, was expressive of obviously sincere puzzlement.

"If you'll drop me at the Palace," Miss Bartworthy said as we went back to the taxicab, "I'll promise not to frighten you with any more faces en route."

"I was more bewildered than frightened," I protested.

"Well, that's good for you."

Nothing else was said on the subject: she was, certainly, an extremely peculiar young woman as well as an extremely thin one.

"What now?" Papa asked when I came into his office. "Smitts says you went away with a man and a girl."

"Nugent and Miss Brenham have been married and are on their way to China."

"China?"

"Yes, sir. Mr. Cayterer told me this morning he had decided to send Nugent over. The wedding and so forth must have been planned some time ago, since, apparently, the license and passports were ready."

"So," Papa said. "Serves Cayterer right — so he decided to get rid of the boy after you told him what you'd seen? He ought to —"

"What do you make of that, Mr. Thin?" Miss Queenan, fairly bursting into the office, interrupted, brandishing a folded newspaper.

Papa took the paper, read, and passed it to me.

"Cayterer's dark horse," he pronounced.

"I bet a nickel," Miss Queenan agreed.

I too agreed with them when I had read the Canton dispatch reporting the finding of the body of a tuchun of one of the larger provinces. The tuchun's widow, physician, and confidential secretary had been arrested, the report went on to say, charged with having poisoned him and concealed his death by means of a pretense that he had gone into the mountains for his health. They were believed to have deposited large sums of money in a Paris bank and to have been about to leave the country when arrested.

"Waiting for Hop Cayterer's contribution before they left," Papa said. "Let's go see him."

Mr. Cayterer was noticeably ill at ease, worried, when Papa and I

were shown into his office.

"You don't happen to know —" he began immediately the how-do-you-do's were over, and stopped. "Miss Brenham, my secretary, went out a little before noon and hasn't come back."

It wasn't a question, but it was meant as one.

"She and your nephew were married, and she has gone with him."

He nodded his large sallow head slowly, as if he had expected that information, or even as if he had feared it.

"Seen this?" Papa asked, giving him the newspaper.

Mr. Cayterer read the Canton dispatch with so expressionless a face that I began to entertain doubts that the tuchun of the dispatch was the tuchun of Mr. Cayterer's plans; but, when he let the paper fall on the desk and made a little rumbling noise deep in his throat, I saw that the blankness of his face was the emptiness of utter consternation. The soft glow from his shaded desk light glinted on hundreds of tiny globules of moisture on his forehead.

"Your man?" Papa demanded.

"My man."

"So. You're lucky he didn't cost you more than the thirty-five thousand you sent Throgmorton."

Blankness went out of Mr. Cayterer's face, to be replaced by surprise at the thought of how much money those three distant Chinese criminals might have cost him.

"And now," Papa went on, "we can go to the Post Office Department for help in catching Mr. B. J. Randall."

"Yes, we can" — Mr. Cayterer avoided Papa's eyes, feeling, I fancied, that he would rather endure his loss than admit to the world that he had twice been so easily and so completely taken in — "but —"

"The matter can be handled," I came to his assistance, "quickly and without undue publicity."

"Now what?" Papa questioned me suspiciously.

"I should like," I spoke to Mr. Cayterer, ignoring Papa's question, "to borrow one of your employees for a few minutes."

"Which one?"

"The boy will do."

Mr. Cayterer stabbed one of the buttons on his desk, and the bright-

eyed office boy appeared.

"See here," I addressed the boy quite sternly, "you've caused an enormous amount of trouble with your Fitzmaurice Throgmorton foolishness, and I don't want any more of it. You bring those drafts back here!"

"W-what do you mean?"

"I mean what I say," quite sharply. "And don't you ever play any more games like this, or you'll be finding yourself in hot water with the Post Office Department. What is your middle name — James, or John, or Joseph?"

"It's Jackson, but —"

"I suppose it is. Now where are those drafts?"

"They're — I don't know what you mean. They're — they're home, pasted in a sort of scrapbook."

"You got hold of this Chinese business hearing your sister and Nugent talk about it?"

"Y-yes, sir."

"And I suppose you sent forwarding address cards to Los Angeles, Portland and Spokane, to have Randall's letters sent to General Delivery here."

"Yes, sir."

"Very well. Now go home and get those drafts and bring them here."

The boy darted out of the office.

"Well, I'll be what he said!" Mr. Cayterer gasped. "But why —? how —?"

"Very simply," I explained, rising and picking up my hat. "I suspected him as soon as you said the letters were in your handwriting. That quite gratuitous bit of finesse must have appealed very strongly to him, but it quite gave him away. Office boys almost always imitate their employers' handwriting: I have never heard of one who didn't at least occasionally copy his boss's signature. It's one of the conventions of the position.

"Then, when you told us he was Miss Brenham's brother, and I found that she and Nugent were intimate, I knew where the boy could have got his information. They no doubt discussed your plans when he was calling on her in the evening, and the boy heard enough

to go on. Further, as an alias, Fitzmaurice Throgmorton has a decidedly juvenile sound; and even its creator distrusted it for actual use, and so fashioned another alias for use at the post office. In fashioning that second one, B. J. Randall, he fell into a quite common error: he was, as people so often are, unable to get away from his own name, and retained his initials, reversing them.

"The fact that the drafts had not come through for collection was another supporting fact: regardless of his honesty, a boy of fifteen could not cash a ten-thousand-dollar draft. But I dare say it was never a matter of money with him: he got his fun out of playing the dashing Fitzmaurice Throgmorton. This Canton dispatch dispelled my last doubt: those people were trying to swindle you out of hundreds of thousands of dollars, and this smaller swindle delayed their success, quite demolished it in fact, so they could not have been responsible for it. I needed some assurance on that point, for the mature oriental mind frequently displays quite definite analogies with the juvenile occidental mind."

"But look here!" Mr. Cayterer objected. "There were those letters. You saw them. They were mailed in Japan."

"I beg your pardon, they were not. Japanese stamps can be procured of any stamp dealer, and a postmark is ridiculously easy to forge. Your office boy would, naturally, have no difficulty at all in getting the letters into your mail."

"There's no use arguing with him," Papa, getting up and clapping his hat on his head, assured Mr. Cayterer. "He's right. Now what are you going to do about that kid?"

Anger pinkened Mr. Cayterer's wan face. "I'm going to—"

"Don't fire him right away," Papa advised. "Climb all over him, but don't fire him. Handle him right and he'll be worth a dozen boys, for a few weeks anyway, until his remorse wears thin. Then you can fire him, and you'll have got that many weeks of good service out of him."

On the heels of this — yes — thoroughly unscrupulous advice Papa and I left Mr. Cayterer's office.